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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, Tuesday, January 19, through a network of 46 NBC associate Radio stations.

Strawberries are perhaps the most universally grown of all of our small fruits. We find them in home gardens from Florida to Maine, and from Maine to California. Strawberries are shipped to the market in carlots from over thirty States. Of course, the number of cars shipped from some of these States is not large, but the total carload movement for all shipping States usually runs around 18,000 cars.

In addition to being an important commercial crop, strawberries are undoubtedly the most important of our small fruits for home use. In the first place, the strawberry is the only small fruit that can be grown in practically every part of the United States. The cultural methods vary in different localities, in fact, when we came to prepare bulletins on strawberries, we had to get out three, one for the Western States, one for the Eastern States, and one for the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast States. That was because the cultural methods are so different, then, there is quite a difference in varieties recommended for the various sections. I am not going to burden you with the numbers of these bulletins, they are all Farmers' Bulletins, and if you write us for a bulletin on strawberry growing, we will send the one that applies to your section.

It is not my purpose today to boost the growing of strawberries for the market, in fact, I would like to get away from all further reference to the market phase of strawberry production, and talk for two or three minutes about growing strawberries for home use. To begin with, you want clean land on which to grow strawberries, newly cleared ground is good, because it contains plenty of humus, and is generally fairly free from weeds. Strawberries will grow on soils that are a trifle acid, and new ground is often a little acid, so you may find it advisable to locate the strawberry patch, not in the regular garden, but perhaps in a corner of a new corn or cotton field, only it is best to have them reasonably near the house for convenience when you want to go to the patch and eat your fill of ripe berries, or pick a quart or two for dinner.

Forty to fifty plants for each individual in the family who is fond of strawberries will be about the right number to plant. Of course, the number depends somewhat upon the method of handling them, and more plants may be required by the hill system than where the plants are allowed to form a matted row. I would suggest planting about 250 or 300 plants for the average family. Don't crowd the plants. For matted row culture, have the rows at least 3 1/2 feet apart, and set the plants 24 to 30 inches apart in the rows. For the hill system, the rows need be only 32 to 36 inches apart, and the plants 18 to 22 inches apart in the rows.

The time of setting the plants will depend upon locality. In the extreme southern sections, the plants may be set as late as October and produce a crop the following winter and spring. In the central sections, they may be set in July or August, and in the extreme northern sections, early spring is recommended. All blossoms should be pinched from the spring-set plants, and no fruit allowed to develop the spring the plants are set.

Here is a point that you want to remember about strawberries. A few

varieties have imperfect flowers, that is, they do not produce pollen so must be pollinated by some other variety that has perfect flowers and does produce pollen. It is always desirable to have at least two varieties for the home planting, one early and one late. Some folks plant an early, a medium, and a late, so as to have strawberries during a longer period. In the extreme southern sections, strawberries bear over a rather long period anyway, and you may see blossoms and ripe fruit on the plants at the same time.

Within the past few years, there has arisen a great demand for frozen and cold packed strawberries to be used in making ice-cream and by soda fountains. The preserving of strawberries by cooking has also grown to a big industry. These special uses have called for the production of varieties having certain flavor and color characters and firm flesh. The Blakemore was the first of these new varieties, and it is now being grown extensively in sections where berries for both the market and the various preserving processes are produced.

Missionary and Howard 17 (Premier) are two of our most important commercial sorts, and these were used as the parents for the Bellmar, another new variety which was originated at the United States Plant Field Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland. So far, this variety has proved promising only in certain of the eastern growing sections. It is a good late variety for the home garden.

The Southland is another of the new varieties originated by the Department, and, as its name implies, it is especially adapted for growing in home gardens from North Carolina to Georgia, and westward to California. It probably is not firm enough for the general market.

The Redheart is another of the new varieties sent out from the Glenn Dale Plant Field Station. In canning tests made by the Department workers, it was found that the Redheart gave the best canned strawberries of all the varieties tried. It is suggested for trial on the heavier soils from New England to Maryland, and west to Wisconsin and Missouri wherever a canning berry of deep, red color, high quality, and firm texture is required. Strawberries are one of the easiest of our fruits to grow, and I do not know of anything more refreshing than a nice dish of strawberries with a little sugar and plenty of cream, so let's grow a few strawberries for home use.